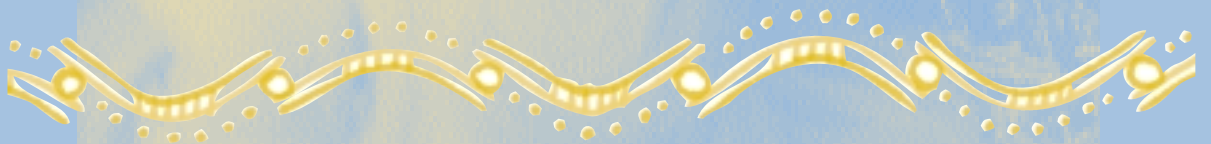




**THE
FRAMEWORK
ABRIDGED
VERSION**



The Framework is a set of ideas to guide people working with children in children's services. It does not tell people what to do, but rather is about the reasons for doing what we do. The Framework has been written to be used along with many ideas and understandings about working with children that come from other sources.

The Framework is made up of

- four core concepts, which are understandings that are the basis for practice
- four major obligations, which are the main responsibilities and the aims or focus of work with children and families
- Four essential qualities or personal characteristics that people must have in order to work well with children and families.

Each part of the Framework relates to and overlaps with each of the others. Although the Framework applies to all children's services, the ways that the ideas in the Framework are carried out in each service will be different.

There are some beliefs about children, families, the community and children's services that are not stated in the Framework, but are the foundation for it. They include the following:

- Children's services are an important part of the community
- Each child is the responsibility of both the child's parents and the community
- The child is a citizen or member of the community with rights and responsibilities
- Care and education cannot be separated. This means that it does not make sense to call some types of services education and others care, or to think of some parts of the child's experience as education and others as care.
- Working with children and their families in a children's services is not simple. To do it well requires a great deal of knowledge in a number

of areas, many skills and certain attitudes.

- Working together or collaborating with others is a better way to get along than competing.

Each of the Framework statements will be discussed in the pages that follow.

CORE CONCEPTS

ABOUT CHILDREN'S SERVICES: CHILDREN'S SERVICES ARE COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS THAT EXIST ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND LEARNING

Children's services play a very important role in the lives of many children and families. Many children spend much of their childhood in a children's service. Many families invest in children's services their energy, money, time and most importantly, their trust that their child's learning and development are being supported. Children's services are an important part of any community that supports families and children. This means that children's services make an important contribution to healthy communities.

What is a healthy community? It is one that

- Is made up of people who are committed to common goals
- Encourages positive, productive, constructive relationships among people
- Accepts and respects diversity
- Respects the rights of each individual.

Children's services are places where people who are diverse in many ways live and work with each other for a single main purpose: to support the learning, development and wellbeing of young children. Children's services are communities that promote learning, not only for children but also for everyone associated with the service.

Children's services are seen in the Framework as being like smaller versions of larger communities as we would like them to be. In larger communities there is a great deal of diversity and also a sense of common purpose. In these communities children experience and are supported to adopt values, attitudes and ways of living that will allow them to become effective members of the communities in which they live now and will live in the future.

In addition, children's services support families in their childrearing role. Parents and family are the most important people in children's lives and the biggest influence on their learning. A major role of children's services is to support the relationship between each child and his or her family by working in partnership with parents and families. Children's services also encourage families to use other services in the community, and to be a part of their local community.

The idea that children are not only future citizens but also citizens now also means that in a children's service an investment is made in children's learning and lives because the quality of children's lives matter right now in the present. Of course it is also true that learning and experiences now are a foundation for the rest of their learning and their life. A child's experiences are both life now and preparation for life in the future.

The notion of the child as citizen means that the child has rights and, as they get older, responsibilities. Each child has the right to be respected as a person and to be treated as a partner in relationships and interactions. A children's service helps children learn to respect and care for other people and for the world around them. In other words, children's services are places where each child is helped to take responsibility for self, others and the physical world.

ABOUT THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS: THE DECISIONS, JUDGMENTS AND CHOICES MADE BY PROFESSIONALS ARE THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE

In the Framework the term professional is used for all adults working with children, regardless of the presence, absence, or level of formal qualifications held. The use of this term is based on the belief that working with children in ways that reflect the ideas in the Framework – that is, the nature of the work itself.

However, the use of this term professional for everyone does not mean that formal qualifications are not important. Quite the opposite is true. Making wise decisions about children's experiences without a doubt requires deep and broad knowledge in a range of areas. Putting this knowledge into practice demands the use of complex skills and sensitivities. These are gained best through formal study leading to a qualification in early childhood care and education. Unquestionably, provision of excellent children's services requires leadership from people with formal qualifications.

People working directly with young children who do not have formal qualifications must be supported, guided and led by people who do. Most importantly, everyone who calls him- or herself an early childhood professional must be active learners throughout life, and participants throughout their professional lives in a variety of experiences that increase knowledge and skills and help them to reflect critically on their practice and to improve all the time. Reflecting and acting on those reflections is the essence of being a professional.

ABOUT CURRICULUM: CURRICULUM IS THE INTENTIONAL PROVISIONS MADE BY PROFESSIONALS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND WELLBEING

Curriculum refers to everything professionals do to support children's learning and development, the whole experience of the child and the child's family in the service. The curriculum includes:

- Setting up the physical environment, equipment and materials
- Interacting with children
- Helping children interact with and relate to other children
- Structuring time

Setting rules and limits

- Planning and providing special events or experiences.
- Organising daily living experiences and routines
- Communicating and relating to other adults in the children's service community, including colleagues and parents

Children respond to and interact with these provisions made by adults. Sometimes what they do is predictable and what we expect, but sometimes they surprise us and do things that are unexpected. It is important for professionals to be open to the unexpected, to allow themselves to be surprised by children.

Curriculum is often thought of as the content of children's experience, but in this Framework the content of children's experiences and of the provisions professionals make for them must relate to the community, the service and the lives and interests of children in the service. This means that it does not make sense to prescribe content in this document. The content of the provisions – that is, what the professional says, offers, does, puts out

in the environment — can be just about anything. An appropriate curriculum is responsive and relevant to the lives of the children and families in the service.

Therefore, the Framework does not provide specific answers to the question: What should happen tomorrow? The answer to that question has to be:

It all depends. What should happen tomorrow requires you to reflect on your understanding of the past and present of the children and families you work with. It requires the use of all of your creativity, knowledge and skills and those of colleagues as well as the perspectives of parents and families of children in your service. You have to look at and listen to what is happening, really see and hear, and then use your professional judgment.

Children's often initiate their own learning in the years before school. Teaching happens minute by minute as professionals offer descriptions and explanations, give demonstrations, ask questions and invite children's questions, raise possibilities, and make suggestions.

ABOUT FRAMEWORKS: A FRAMEWORK BOTH PROVIDES DEFINITION AND SUPPORTS UNIQUENESS

A curriculum framework is not the same thing as a curriculum. One useful way of thinking about a framework is to think about the frame for a house. Even a very simple basic frame gives some ideas about the house: its location, overall size and shape, for example. It may indicate the number, shape and size of rooms, and their relation to each other. A more detailed frame gives some information about the location of windows and doors, the likely position of plumbing, and other features of the house. However, even the most detailed frame does not give a full picture of what

the house will look like when it is finished, furnished, and people are living in it.

Just as with the frame of a house, the Framework provides some important information about what a children's service will look like and what should happen in it. At the same time the Framework actively encourages professionals to fit their practice to the specific community, children and families they are working with. In other words, the Framework encourages diversity, innovation and uniqueness. It can fit with particular philosophies and approaches to early childhood practice. No two services using the Framework will look the same.

MAJOR OBLIGATIONS

TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT RESPECTFUL LIFE-ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS

The aim of children's services is to encourage relationships that support children to:

- Feel a sense of belonging
- See themselves as making a positive contribution
- See themselves as valued, unique and powerful human beings
- Have relationships of caring and respect
- Appreciate the power of working with others to come up with new ideas, make progress, and solve problems and have the skills to do this

There are many kinds of relationships that are important in a children's service, including those between:

- Children and other children
- Professionals and children

- Children and their families
- Professionals and parents/families
- Professionals
- Families and other families
- Managers/owners/sponsoring agencies and parents, professionals.
- Professionals and colleagues in other services and in related disciplines
- The service and relevant community agencies and organisations
- Children and the broader community
- The service as an institution and the broader geographic and professional communities.

Children experience these relationships directly or observe them. Through them they learn to relate to others, their lives are enriched, and they in turn enrich the lives of others.

It is through listening to, watching, speaking with, working and playing with, arguing and debating with others that solutions to problems are found, new discoveries made, and creative outcomes achieved. Promoting relationships is also promoting a sense of community, where each person has rights and responsibilities.

TO PRACTISE IN WAYS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHILD AS CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL

The child in this Framework is seen as strong, powerful, competent, complex, and full of possibilities. Children's services are built around deep respect for the child as a human being in the present. Working well with young children requires the professional to believe in their ability and competence. This respect and belief, when communicated in ways that children can understand, forms the basis for their identity and

self-esteem. The picture or image that professionals have of children affects the ways they work with and relate to them. This picture is passed on to children. A positive picture of oneself as a powerful learner, if nurtured, contributes to lifelong competence.

The child, no matter how young, has many skills and abilities and is a powerful and active contributor to his or her own learning. Children, along with the people around them, build knowledge and understanding from the experiences they have. Children have many more theories, thoughts and ideas than adults teach them. Adults need to listen and watch carefully to understand children's experience and meaning.

Young children are held back more by adults not appreciating or paying attention to their strengths, interests and what they are communicating through their behaviour than they are by their own limitations. Children, even very young children, are often more competent, more intelligent, more capable than they are seen or understood to be. Young children have the right to have their potential supported.

Professionals start with a child's strengths and a belief that children are worth listening to and considering seriously. They try to see the world through the child's eyes in order to discover the meaning the child has made rather than imposing their own meaning.

This Framework requires that professionals look at children as people with certain characteristics who are learning, becoming, developing, and adding new knowledge, skills and understandings all the time. The picture of the child as capable and resourceful is tied closely to the idea of childhood as a meaningful period in a human being's life, not a kind of preparation for adulthood. Each phase in life brings with it certain characteristics, limitations, and special challenges, and the relationships, experiences, environments, and opportunities offered to a child should be

appropriate for the child as he or she is now. It is through that matching that children are prepared best for their future lives.

Viewing children as capable and resourceful means recognising that there are many ways to be clever. Some children are very good at interacting and communicating with others. Some children are very well co-ordinated physically, very skilled at using their bodies. Some children are very good at expressing themselves. Some children show great ability with thinking and problem solving. Some children are excellent drawers, painters, dancers or actors. One of the challenges for professionals is to identify the strengths of each child and nurture them.

TO STRIVE FOR MEANING AND CONNECTIONS

Children learn best when they have enough time to become involved deeply in meaningful experiences that reflect their interests and their lives.

The term connections refers to some of the many ways that children gain understanding and make meaning – ways that a child explores, experiments, combines, takes apart, reflects, imagines, hypothesises and considers possibilities in order to make sense of the world. Being competent is in large part about being able to make links and connections. These connections sometimes happen when the child works alone, but more often come about through interactions and relationships.

There are many kinds of connections that are worth attending to. For example, connecting children to their past and likely future is important. Connecting children with the community in ways that are appropriate nurtures a sense of comfort, familiarity, and belonging.

Striving for meaning applies at many levels. Professionals help children and other adults make meaning when they:

- Are responsive and open to what experiences mean, and look for messages or meanings behind behaviour
- Respond to people as unique individuals
- Communicate respectfully and honestly
- Are open to alternative perspectives and take them seriously.

Making meaning is also about the relevance of what is offered to children. New experiences build on others that the child has had in the past or is having in the present. Experiences in a children's service connect with those outside the children's service.

TO HONOUR DIVERSITY

Children's services are made up of people who are different from each other in many ways – for example, cultural and language backgrounds, gender, lifestyle, socio-economic status, family composition, abilities, and personal beliefs and values. In addition there is individuality, the uniqueness of each person involved in the service.

In the Framework the term honouring instead of the more frequently used term celebrating is used to describe our obligation. Diversity is sometimes a cause of struggles, conflicts, tensions, and differences that may at first seem impossible to resolve. Dealing with diversity in a constructive way often raises complex ethical and professional dilemmas. It can be sometimes truly difficult to incorporate diversity in a meaningful way into our individual and collective thinking and practice in children's services.

Celebrating is a good way to describe the many ways that children's services can acknowledge the richness that cultural and other differences can bring to the daily lives of people, for example, in food, music, art and craft, festivals and holidays, and dress. Celebrations are an important part of

the life of the larger community and the children's services community. However, the concept of celebration does not do justice to the harder issues related to diversity, issues about biases, prejudice, ethnocentrism, misunderstanding, and fear of difference.

Diversity is viewed as positive and enriching in the Framework, as well as a reality in children's present and future lives. It is very important that they are comfortable with difference rather than threatened by it, that they appreciate the ways in which all people are similar and different at the same time, and that they respond to diversity with openness and confidence.

Culture and language are part of identity. Children will suffer if their culture and language are ignored or demeaned, or dismissed as unworthy. Children who stand out because of their difference deserve respect and acceptance.

In general it is not appropriate to "do cultures" in children's services, that is, to single out a particular culture for attention at a specific time outside the normal context of what goes on. Often "doing cultures" translates into a superficial collection of materials and experiences that do not reflect the lives and interests of the people using the service, or in the local community. These can in fact re-inforce stereotypes and bias rather than diminish them, and separating out a particular culture for attention can re-inforce the idea of it sitting apart from the normal everyday lives of everyone. What is more appropriate is to integrate cultural diversity into every aspect of the children's experience: music, art, language, home corner equipment, books and stories, pictures, and food, for example. What is a more appropriate aim is to incorporate the various ways people live their lives in the near and the broader community into the experience of children and families in the children's service. Cultural appropriateness is achieved through responsiveness, openness to the lives of the families in the service and in the community.

True openness to and respect for diverse perspectives and views and willingness to take the perspective of the other is an essential characteristic of a children's services professional. However, honouring diversity does not mean condoning or adopting practices or offering experiences simply because they are seen to be culturally based. Honouring diversity means that any request by a parent is considered thoughtfully and that there is genuine openness to its possibility.

A children's service can be a place for a child with a disability where the child as a child is the focus rather than the disability or condition. Children may not see themselves as having a disability until someone tells them. They may simply see that they are different. When differences are acknowledged, accepted, and appreciated, the child may simply see himself or herself as being "one kind of different". Differences are interesting to children, and they notice them at a surprisingly early age. Fear, discomfort and shame associated with differences however, is usually learned from people around the child who display those feelings.

Honouring diversity is closely related to inclusion in its truest sense. Inclusion is a term used often when a child with a disability comes to a children's service. Inclusion in its best sense is not about altering the provisions for other children to suit a child with a disability so that each child has a version of what the other children are offered. True inclusion is something much more holistic and requires that the professional make provisions that allow each child, including a child with a disability, to use the provision if they wish in ways that are engaging, interesting, and constructive. Inclusion means thinking always about each child and all the children in a group and what will match and extend their abilities, strengths, and interests.

The lives and wellbeing of all members of the Australian community, including young children, are affected by the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their present circumstances, and the need to acknowledge their situation and

work together to move forward constructively. It is essential that every children's service acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage that all Australians share and contributes to reconciliation. Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are present in a service, particular efforts are made in collaboration with families and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to support those children to identify with and be proud of their cultural background.

Honouring diversity is a fundamental concern in every children's service. It is not an issue only if people from diverse cultures are represented in the service; it is not something that is "tacked on" or inserted artificially into the children's experience. It is not a set of activities and concerns that focus on the child or family who is "different" in some way. Rather, it is a state of heart and mind, a fundamental dimension of every aspect of the operation of all children's services.

The aim is that the children's service is a place where concepts of democracy, equity and social justice are not only talked about but more importantly are enacted in practice.

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES

EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to see things from the perspective of others. In relation to children, it means opening yourself up to what they are saying about what they are interested in and what they need. It is appreciation of the fact that sharing different perspectives results in a richness of understanding.

RESPECT

Respect comes from a deep belief in the worth of all human beings, and acting on those beliefs. This requires the ability to listen to others, openness to

new possibilities and perspectives, and the courage to act.

PERSEVERANCE AND RESILIENCE

Perseverance or tenacity is about commitment and conviction that enable the professional to continue on in the face of obstacles, setbacks and lack of progress.

Resilience is remaining strong and positive in difficult situations in the belief that they can be resolved in a positive way.

PASSION FOR LEARNING THAT LEADS TO GROWTH

Working with young children and their families is demanding intellectually when it is done well. Professionals working in children's services must have a strong drive to know more, regardless of experience or current knowledge and skills. In other words, they must see themselves as lifelong learners.

Openness to new perspectives and ones that are different to their own is important, and that must be balanced with conviction about beliefs.

New learning leads to growth, which often leads to change. The courage to embrace complexity, to take reasonable risks and to change is essential.